

Montpelier Roxbury Public Schools

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Our schools are caring, creative, and equitable communities that empower all children to build on their talents and passions to grow into engaged citizens and life-long learners.

To: The Senate Committee on Education

From: Libby Bonesteel, Superintendent, and Michael Berry, Director of Curriculum and Technology, Montpelier Roxbury School District (MRPS)

Date: May 4, 2026

Subject: Testimony Regarding H.650 – An act relating to education technology products

LIBBY BONESTEEL:

For the record, my name is Libby Bonesteel, and I serve as the Superintendent of the Montpelier Roxbury School District. I am accompanied by Michael Berry, our Director of Curriculum and Technology. Mike is an expert in the field of educational technology. We are here today to speak on H.650, a bill that touches the very heart of how we prepare Vermont's children for their future.

I want to begin by strongly advocating for the [alternative language](#) and two-track approach proposed by the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), the Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA), the Vermont Principals' Association (VPA), and the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA). Our state's leading educational organizations are in rare, unanimous agreement: we must separate the legal necessity of data privacy from the instructional challenge of educational technology effectiveness.

We urge this Committee to support the AOE in providing statewide legal and contract management and to make participation in the Vermont Student Data Privacy Alliance (VT SDPA) universal. Crucially, we must ensure that curriculum decisions remain with local districts, supported by state-level guidance rather than a rigid, state-run product certification. Simply put, curriculum decisions, like the decision to use a particular software to accomplish a learning goal, is not at all the same as an outside entity certifying said software and should not be treated as such. These decisions are carefully considered by our teaching staff and, like many instructional decisions, should not be legislated.

MICHAEL BERRY:

My name is Mike Berry. As a technology director, I agree with the core sentiment driving much of this bill. There *is* a screen time crisis. There *are* educational technologies that are used as passive crutches rather than profound learning tools.

However, applying a five-year moratorium on generative AI and chatbots is not the solution. Part of the confusion and concern currently surrounding H.650 stems from its use of broad, non-specific language. The bill uses terms like chatbot and Generative AI interchangeably and without clear definitions. This is a dangerous conflation. It lumps together predatory, social-media-style AI companions designed specifically for parasocial engagement and endless scrolling with profound, instructional AI tutors designed to help a student work through a complex physics problem. A blanket ban on chatbots also outlaws the speech-to-text accessibility bots that our dyslexic and multi-lingual learners rely on every single day to participate equitably in their education.

Recently, a student said something to me that stopped me in my tracks. Speaking about the rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence, they said: *"It's really hard to watch the adults around us not know what to do with this."*

Our students are begging for our guidance. If we are going to survive the evolution of AI, it requires the most mature version of humanity. That maturity cannot be developed if students don't have the opportunity to learn, make mistakes, and understand these tools in a safe, supervised environment. We also must give them the opportunity to develop a critical understanding to do profound good with this technology.

Just last week, MRPS hosted the first annual Vermont AI & Impact Student Symposium. We challenged students to use AI to solve real community problems. A junior from CVU built "Weatherbird," an AI-driven tool that integrates local weather and VTrans data to predict dangerous icy road conditions and flood threats to help keep teen drivers safe. Students from Essex High School built "Neighbor AI," a tool designed to combat the epidemic of isolation among our elderly rural populations by facilitating community check-ins and transit support.

If H.650's vague moratorium goes into effect, these students never get the chance to build those profound, human-centric solutions. We cannot protect our students from the future by pretending it isn't happening.

In response to the current draft of H.650, we recommend the following actions:

1. Remove the 5-Year Moratorium & Define the Terminology: We ask that you strike the blanket ban on "chatbots." Instead, the legislature must explicitly define and differentiate between *Instructional/Accessibility AI* (tools used for targeted learning, translation, or tutoring) and *Predatory Companion AI* (tools designed for emotional manipulation,

parasocial relationships, or prolonged unstructured screen time). You can, and should, regulate the latter without banning the former, however it is not something that can be accomplished in the limited time you have. This type of language needs to be well-thought out after hearing from experts in both the field of education and the field of generative AI so that it has the desired impact. AI changes by the minute. Language governing its use needs to be nuanced enough to respond to the rapid innovation.

2. Shift from State Certification to Local Pedagogical Vetting: Instead of tasking the state with certifying products, require school districts to identify exactly *how* they will vet technology used locally. This can be done in partnership with the AOE as has been heard from testimony from the AOE, VPA, VSA, and VSBA.
 - a. Tie EdTech Vetting to the Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP): Require districts to implement a proven framework—such as the SAMR Model (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition)—to ensure technology is used for profound instructional redesign rather than passive screen time. This can be tracked via the existing CIP process.
3. Adopt the AOE/VSA/VSBA/VPA Data Privacy Recommendations: Secure our students' data today using the existing VT SDPA infrastructure.

We need to work with our educators to redesign assessments so they measure process rather than just product. We must empower students to be skeptical, analytical users of technology who understand how to verify information and use AI as a collaborator, not a crutch. These are not nice ideas for teachers and students to master; they are essential skills in the world our kids are entering, for some, in just a few short months.

By following the AOE and VSA's recommendations, we can secure our students' data today while ensuring they have the skills to lead in the world they will grow into.